CEREMONIES Of the UTE INDIANS

For those millions who feel a pang of regret at the passing of the romantic American Indian and thrill at his pinto horse, war-bonnet, and bright-colored blankets and beadwork, the Uintah Basin offers an opportunity to learn exactly how this romantic race lived in days gone by as well as how they are living on government reservations today.

Uintah Basin maintains 1200 Indians located on some of the finest land in eastern Utah. In fact, government reclamation and rehabilitation services have discriminated in favor of the long-abused Red Men in distributing land and water resources

One Sun Dance and three Bear dance ceremonials are held on the reservation each year The latter take place at Myton, Ouray and Whiterocks, with the Sun dance at Whiterocks only.

The Sun dance is an observance of an Indian superstition and the participants must dance continuously (usually two days and three nights) without food or drink. The belief is that if the ceremony is continuously followed, it will bring blessings from the Sun God. The dance takes place around a tree trunk or pole placed in the center of a circular pavilion or arena made of willows. Around the arena are booths and resting places constructed of willows in which the braves rest periodically during the dance. Atop the tree or pole is a buffalo head or some similar emblem. The braves almost naked, painted and blowing shrill whistles, dance back and forth toward the central pole, accompanied by the drums and chants of the men and women of the tribe. The dancing, standard, mechanical Indian forward and backward hopping during most of the ceremony, is spiced with occasional spurts of frenzied action. Grand finale of the dance and ceremony is a feast which lasts sometimes as long as two days..

More than any other of the Ute ceremonies the Sun dance furnishes the tribe the opportunity to express their emotions in rhythm and music. Fulfilling the same needs "civilized" whites fill through conventions, sports carnivals, social affairs, and conclaves, the Sun Dance gives tribesmen the opportunity for making and renewing common interests and policies; for the exhibition of grief over those who have recently died, for the fulfillment of social obligations, and for providing mating opportunities for Indian eligibles.

The Sun Dance ritual indicates that once long ago in a period of famine, an Indian brave wandered forth with his squaw in behalf of his tribe, encountered one of the gods, fasted, learned the Sun Dance ceremony, returned to the tribe where it was taught to the group and danced by them The ceremony brought relief through the appearance of the buffalo, and feasting ensued. The ceremony is thus regarded as one of rebirth or reanimation.

The Central pole, warriors wearing apparel, the camp circle, whistles, the entire lodge, and even the colors of the paints applied to dancers' bodies, have symbolic significances which are still being studied by students of Indian legend, religion and tradition.

Most popular of the remaining Indian ceremonies is the Bear Dance which in some sections is reaching the "hot-dog, ice-cream cone, picnic" stage in which both white men and Indians celebrate together. Uintah's three Bear Dances usually held during March (when Bruin is supposed to end his winter's hibernation), sometimes attract as many as a thousand whites per day, and the Ouray Tribe dance of 1934 was presented along with an elaborate pageant with white people cooperating.

Standard equipment for the Bear Dance is a large banner picturing a buckskin-clad and war-bonnetted brave saluting a large grizzly, which is hoisted over the west side of the 6 to 7 feet high dance enclosure or "corral," made of willows and brush..

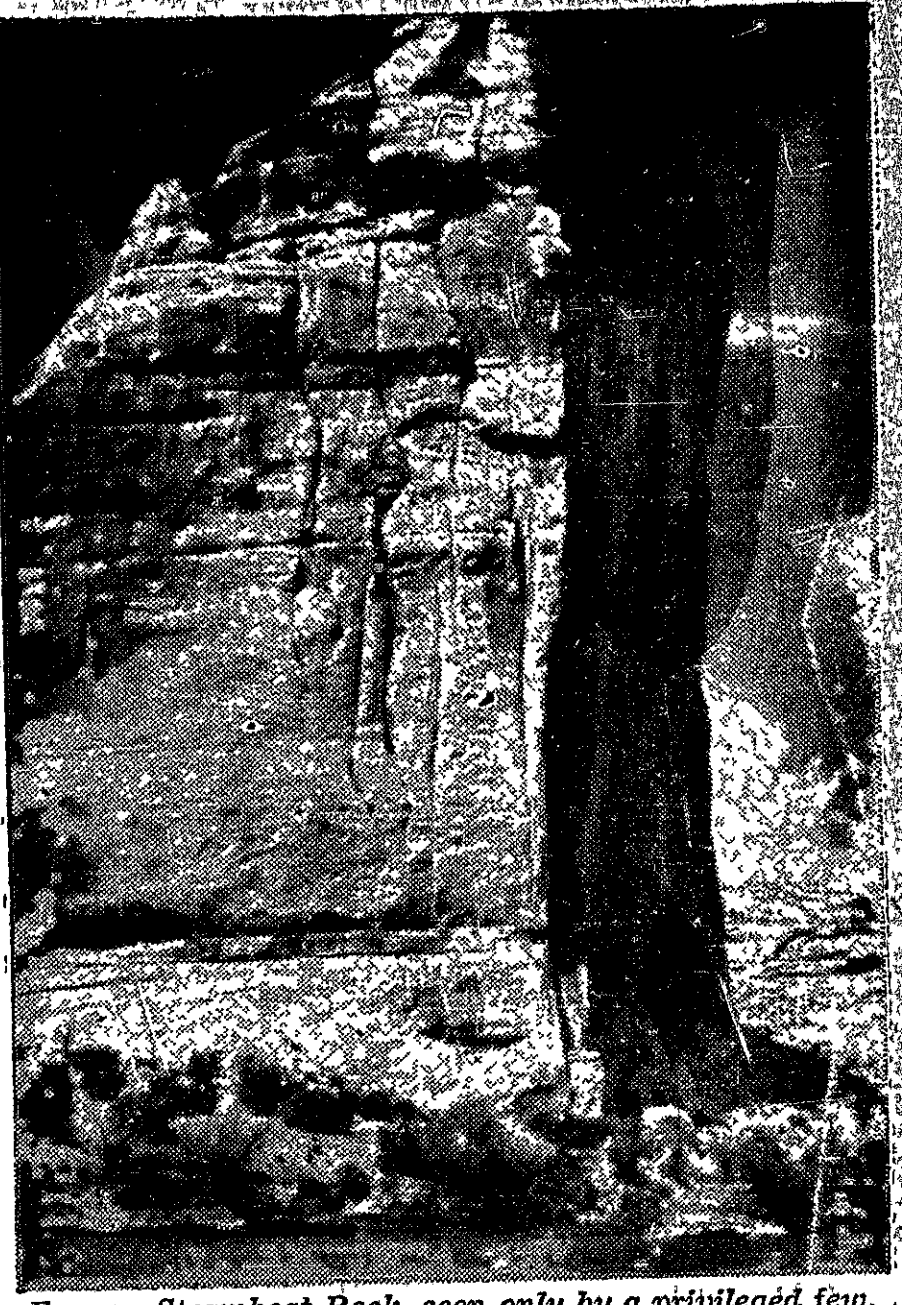
Women begin the dance by passing among seated braves and indicate the man of their choice by a tap or wave of the hand; they then retire to the center of the enclosure and form a line facing westward where they await their male partners, who form in a line facing them a few feet distant.

Each line locks arms, and, facing their prospective partners in the opposite column, the lines dance forward and backward in swaying columns, two steps forward and three short steps backward, one line advancing and the other retreating.

Armed with a willow, a master of ceremonies keeps the lines straight by clipping lagging dancers.

The music—a rhythm difficult to maintain—is made by rubbing a stick over a notched bone or a hardwood stick which is held against an improvised drum. The players sing a high-pitched chant as they play.

Ceremonial aspects of the Bear Dance are fast disappearing while the social appeal is becoming more and more paramount. Like the Sun Dance, the Bear Dance ends with feasting and merriment.



Famous Steamboat Rock, seen only by a privileged few, will be one of the main attractions in the enlarged Dinosaur National Monument. Steamboat Rock was named by Major John Wesley Powell on the Powell Expedition 69 years ago. It stands 880 feet high and one half mile long. When viewed from the side it resembles a huge steamer. It is located at the junction of the Green and Yampa Rivers, near the northern Utah-Colorado border.

Courtesy Deseret News